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SCHOOL LEADERS' GUIDANCE:
USING SEND FUNDING EXEMPLARS

KATE STRADLING AND ANNEMARI OTTRIDGE
SWINDON BOROUGH COUNCIL
SEND Consultants

Contents

1. Purpose and Position 2
2. Understanding the Structure of Exemplars 2
3. Linking Exemplars to the Banding Framework 2
4. Linking Exemplars to the Cost Library 3
5. Applying the Exemplars in Practice 4
6. Key Principles for Leaders 5
7. Final Position 6

1. Purpose and Position

This guidance sets out how leaders and SENCOs should use the SEND funding exemplars to support consistent, needs-led decision-making across the system. The exemplars are intended to provide a clear bridge between the **Banding Framework**, the **Cost Library**, and practice in schools and settings.

What Exemplars Are Not:

- They are not a checklist to be completed.
- They are not fixed profiles that pupils must match.
- They are not a mechanism for determining funding based on diagnosis or label.
- They should not be used to justify provision that is not evidenced by need. Misuse of exemplars in these ways risks undermining consistent and equitable decision-making.

Additional clarification:
Exemplars support decision-making but do not replace professional judgement. Leaders should apply them flexibly where individual pupil profiles do not align precisely with a single example.

2. Understanding the Structure of Exemplars

Each exemplar follows a consistent format. This consistency is deliberate and should be used by leaders as a reference point when considering provision and funding:

Component	Purpose in Practice	What Leaders Should Focus On
Context	Describes the pupil's profile of need in clear, applied terms	Whether the needs described reflect real patterns of difficulty rather than labels
Impact on learning	Explains how the needs affect access, participation and functioning	The degree to which learning is dependent on support
Funding breakdown	Shows how provision is typically constructed (staffing, intervention, resources)	The balance of provision and whether it is proportionate
Funding justification	Links need directly to level of funding and band	Whether the rationale clearly explains why this level of support is required

For example, in a higher band profile, the exemplar demonstrates a pupil requiring continuous adult support to maintain safe access to the environment and curriculum, with needs affecting mobility, communication and processing. The funding is therefore predominantly directed towards staffing, and the justification clearly links this to the requirement for sustained supervision and scaffolding.

3. Linking Exemplars to the Banding Framework

The Banding Framework sets out expectations at a system level. The exemplars translate those expectations into practical, observable provision.

The critical point for leaders is that banding is determined by **the level and nature of provision required**, not by diagnosis, label or placement.

Practical decision-making process:
To support consistency, leaders should apply the following sequence:

1. Identify and evidence the pupil's needs
2. Define the provision required to meet those needs
3. Compare this provision with exemplar patterns across bands
4. Check that provision is proportionate and promotes independence
5. Confirm the most appropriate band based on provision level

The progression across bands can be understood most clearly through the way provision is structured:

Band	Typical Provision Characteristics	Key Distinction
Band 3	Regular, structured adult support across learning, alongside targeted intervention and differentiated teaching	Support is frequent but not continuous
Band 4	Targeted adult support at planned points, structured routines and low-intensity intervention to maintain engagement	Support is responsive and structured rather than sustained throughout
Band 5	Sustained targeted support across the day, particularly for communication and regulation, without default 1:1 provision	Support is consistent but still promotes independence
Band 8	Continuous 1:1 support required to ensure safety, access and participation	Support is constant and essential for access

This scaling is fundamental. Leaders should use the exemplars to understand how provision changes in intensity and consistency across bands, rather than attempting to match pupils directly to individual examples.

4. Linking Exemplars to the Cost Library

The exemplars and the cost library are designed to operate together as part of a single, coherent funding model.

The funding breakdown within each exemplar reflects how provision translates into cost. This includes staffing, intervention delivery, training, resources and leadership oversight.

The relationship between the two can be understood as follows:

Exemplar Element	Cost Library Alignment	Implication for Leaders
High staffing allocation (e.g. continuous 1:1)	High-cost staffing model within cost library	Indicates sustained adult dependency and higher funding band
Mixed model of staffing and intervention	Balanced cost profile across staffing and programmes	Reflects targeted and structured provision rather than continuous supervision
Training and specialist input	Workforce development and specialist services	Ensures provision is deliverable and staff are appropriately skilled
Resources and adaptations	Equipment and environmental cost assumptions	Links physical and sensory needs to tangible provision costs

For example, where a Band 8 exemplar allocates most of the funding to 1:1 staffing, this directly aligns with cost assumptions relating to continuous adult support. In contrast, mid-level bands show a broader distribution of funding across staffing, intervention and resources.

Leaders should therefore be clear that the exemplars describe how provision is constructed in practice, while the cost library ensures that this provision is costed consistently across the system.

5. Applying the Exemplars in Practice

Exemplars should be used as a structured point of reference to support decision-making, rather than as fixed models.

Practical Application:

- Start with the pupil's needs, not the funding band, and use exemplars to sense-check provision. Compare current provision in their setting against exemplar models to identify gaps or over-reliance on certain approaches.
- Use exemplars during moderation discussions to support consistent decision-making across the school or partnership.
- Ensure that provision described in plans can be clearly linked back to the level and type of support outlined in the exemplars.
- Use the funding breakdowns to review whether resource allocation reflects actual provision in place. Exemplars should support professional dialogue, not replace it.

Strengthening evidence use:
Provision and funding decisions must be supported by clear evidence, including:

- Observations of need and support required
- Individual plans and provision maps
- Evidence of impact over time
- Professional assessments where relevant

Exemplars should support professional dialogue, not replace it.

The relationship between need, provision and funding should always remain central:

Area of Use	How Exemplars Support Practice	Leader Focus
Decision-making	Provide a benchmark for comparing levels of need and support	Ensure provision is proportionate and evidence-based
Consistency	Support shared interpretation of need across settings	Align practice across mainstream, SRP and specialist provision
Funding justification	Model clear, concise rationale for funding levels	Strengthen the link between need and provision
Provision design	Illustrate how support can be structured effectively	Balance support with independence and avoid over-reliance

For example, a Band 3 profile demonstrates how structured support and intervention enable access without continuous adult presence, whereas a Band 5 profile shows how sustained support may be required across the day but still does not equate to full 1:1 provision. This distinction is critical when designing provision and justifying funding.

Additional implementation consideration:
Leaders should be mindful of risks including:

- Over-reliance on 1:1 support where independence could be developed
- Under-identification of need due to existing staffing or resource constraints

6. Key Principles for Leaders

Across all bands and exemplars, a consistent set of principles underpins effective use:

Principle	What This Means in Practice
Needs-led approach	Funding decisions must be based on the provision required to meet need, not existing resource or placement
Proportionate support	The level of adult support should directly reflect the level of need and avoid unnecessary escalation, so the use of a graduated response is necessary and proportionate. Effective provision at lower bands should reduce escalation to higher levels of need over time (early intervention).
Independence	Provision should always aim to build autonomy, even where high levels of support are required
Clarity, consistency and transparency	Funding decisions must be clearly explained and consistently applied, with similar levels of need resulting in broadly comparable funding decisions.
System consistency	Similar levels of need should lead to similar levels of support across all settings. Exemplars guide thinking but should not replace professional judgement.

7. Final Position

The exemplars are a core component of the SEND banding model. They ensure that there is a clear and consistent link between how need is understood, how provision is delivered, and how funding is applied.

Used effectively, they support a system in which funding is distributed more equitably, based on a shared understanding of provision, and grounded in the reality of what is required to enable pupils to access learning, participate fully, and make progress.

Moderation and Quality Assurance:
Leaders should use exemplars as part of internal and external moderation processes to ensure consistency in decision-making. This may include:

- Peer review of funding decisions within a school or across a group of schools.
- SENCO and leadership discussions using exemplars as a shared reference point.
- Reviewing a sample of cases to ensure alignment between need, provision and funding.
- Regular moderation helps ensure that the exemplars are being applied consistently and that funding decisions remain equitable across the system.

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Exceptional cases

In a small number of cases, a pupil's needs and required provision may not align securely with the existing banding framework or exemplar patterns. This may occur where:

- The type of provision required is atypical, or cannot be described through existing models
- The intensity and combination of needs go beyond those reflected in the highest band exemplars
- Provision requires highly individualised or specialist arrangements that sit outside standard cost assumptions

In these situations, leaders should continue to apply the needs = provision =funding sequence. They should clearly evidence why existing bands and exemplars do not adequately describe the provision required, avoid simply selecting the highest band where this does not accurately reflect provision and escalate for exceptional consideration through agreed local processes

Exceptional consideration does not replace the banding system, but operates alongside it to ensure that: funding remains needs-led and proportionate; remain transparent and consistent at system level.

Appendix A: Exceptional SEND Packages

Purpose

This appendix defines how exceptional SEND provision is identified where a pupil's needs cannot be met within band-aligned provision, exemplar models or cost library assumptions. It supports consistent, transparent and defensible decision-making across the framework.

Position

The banding framework, exemplars and cost library together describe how provision should normally be structured, delivered and funded. Exceptional provision applies only where these cannot safely or consistently meet need in practice. It operates alongside the system to ensure that provision specified in Section F remains deliverable.

Threshold for Exceptional Consideration

Exceptional consideration applies where there is clear evidence that required provision cannot be aligned to exemplar models or delivered within banding framework and cost assumptions. This must be demonstrated through a mismatch between need, provision and the framework, rather than severity alone, and must show risk to access, safety, stability or outcomes if standard models are applied.

Characteristics of Exceptional Cases

Exceptional cases arise where provision cannot be constructed using existing exemplar patterns. This reflects provision that is structurally different rather than simply more intensive, for example where staffing, coordination, safety or complexity requirements fall outside what exemplars describe, or where system factors prevent provision being delivered consistently through standard models.

Evidence Requirements

All decisions must be grounded in clear evidence drawn from APDR cycles, professional advice and observed impact. Provision must be specified as a deliverable model, consistent with exemplar expectations, including who delivers it, what is delivered and how often. A costed provision model must demonstrate alignment to the cost library and clearly show where exemplar-based assumptions break down. There must be a clear rationale explaining why provision cannot be constructed through existing exemplars or funded through banding.

Decision-Making

A structured process must be followed to identify need, define provision, and test alignment against exemplar models, banding and cost assumptions. Where mismatch is confirmed, a bespoke package should be developed and progressed through local processes, supported by a clear and auditable evidence base.

Safeguards and System Principles

Decisions must remain needs-led, evidence-based and proportionate. Exemplars and banding should guide but not constrain provision. Exceptional routes must not be used to extend the framework or respond to capacity pressures. All packages should be time-bound, reviewed regularly and adjusted as needs change.

Final Position

Exceptional provision ensures that where need cannot be met through exemplar-aligned models, banding framework and cost library costings, there remains a clear and consistent route to securing provision that is deliverable, evidence-based and aligned to statutory duties. It maintains the integrity of the wider system while ensuring full alignment between need, provision and cost.